EDAP 585 Vicky Cummings

The people born in the past twenty years have grown up in a very different world than the one many of their teachers grew up in. The idea that a computer operating system is something to be “learned” is laughable to the digital native. They use the GPS on their smart phones to go everywhere, but would be lost without it. They have an intuitive sense of how to navigate in the digital world, but research shows that their uses are mainly for social communication: Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and, of course, texting. They have an air of accomplishment with the digital medium, but can they really be considered a digital native if they have spent their energy simply widening their digital friend group?

The students in our high school classrooms are clearly addicted to the constant stimulation of social media, but they pay a high price for that stimulation. Some researchers believe that the uptick in mood and attention disorders are due to the increased use of devices during the time that the brain is developing. In addition, this “digital native” generation is accustomed to instant gratification and this can create an irrational impatience with anything that is less than instantaneous. They enjoy collaborative work and the actual creation of a product, something that squarely lands them in the middle of the collective intelligence of the Web 2.0.

To challenge and engage these students in the classroom, there must be a radical change to how we organize our classes. Direct instruction should be extremely brief, no more than 10-15 minutes, if necessary. Better still would be an inquiry-based approach. That would allow the students to have choice and agency in choosing a project or product. The class should be structured to allow for group work and collaboration, and the technology: student ration should be 1:1. These students need to learn how to use technology to analyze, think critically and create. If the students are engaged in creating their own learning experiences, there will be no time for the disengaged student to be sleeping in the back of the room.